

ACCESS TO THE ARTS

Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or HANDICAP. 1981, c. 53, s. 1; 1986, c. 64, s. 18 (1).

Chapter 53

Human Rights Code, 1981

The issue concerning accessibility at the Ontario College of Art is one that needs to be re-examined. There are students at this school who are physically unable to access some of the classrooms, bathrooms, and other main areas such as the Auditorium, Cafeteria, and the Atrium. Is OCA accessible? Sure - they can enter the school (provided the snow and ice is cleared away), but can they access all parts of the school? NO. They are denied their rights as expressed in the Human Rights Code.

I had a chance to speak with Spirit, a student here at OCA who has encountered all of these barriers, and more. This is an ongoing battle. OCA has done a few things to make the school more accessible, but they need to do more. There are prospective students who may decide against this school next fall because they feel that they are unable to get around comfortably and with dignity.

As I have wandered around OCA, I have noticed a few positive things: an elevator, wheelchair accessible bathrooms, designated fire zones, automatic doors, and

ACCESS AT A GLANCE **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

For students with disabilities, access means many things: adequate government funding, reasonable class sizes and a suitable loan/grant program.

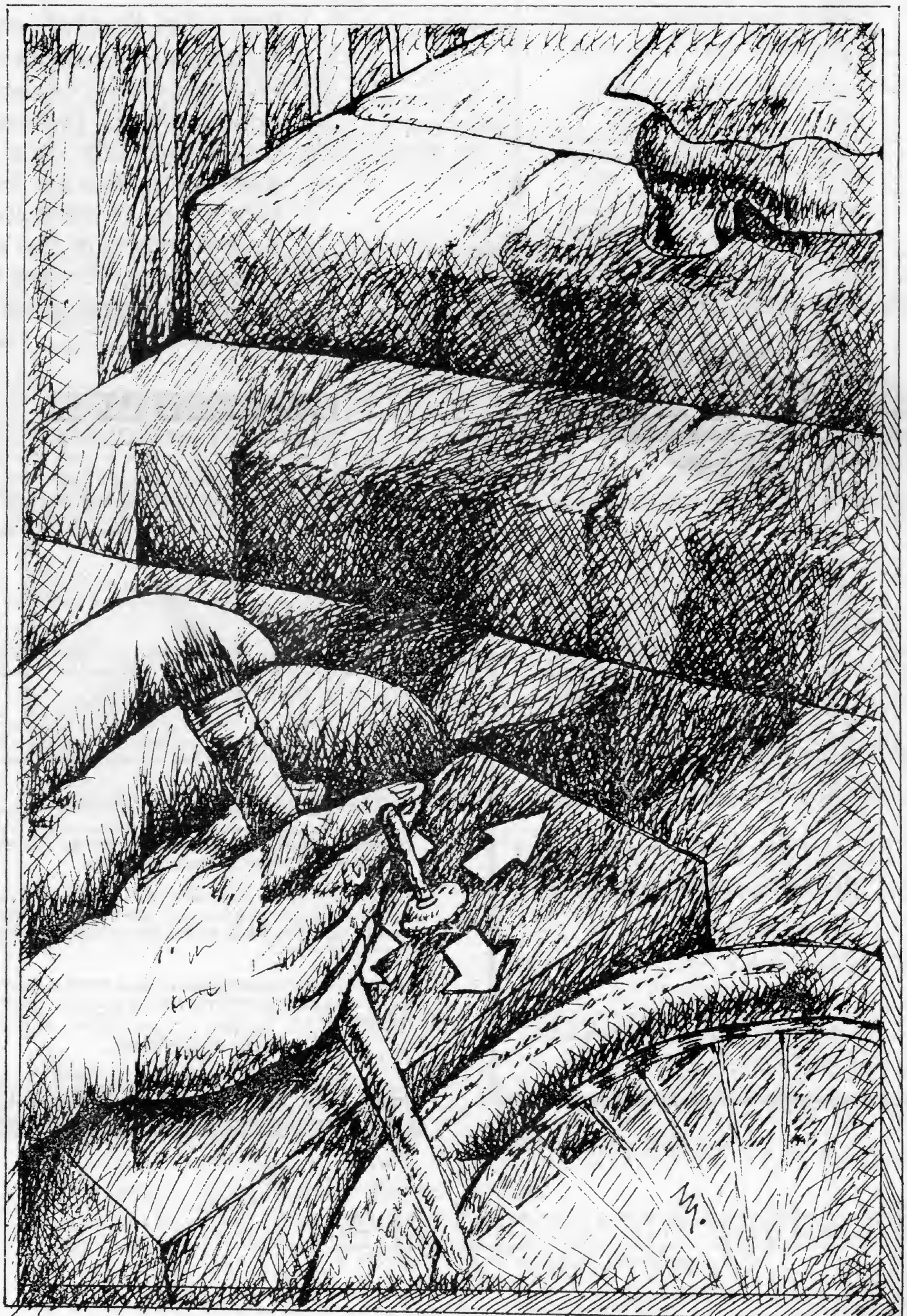
Access is also as fundamental as:

- doors that are wide enough to allow wheelchairs
- signage in large print and braille
- being allowed to tape lectures
- availability of elevators
- accessible washrooms, and
- learning materials in alternative format, such as braille, audio tapes, etc.
- As the federal government continues to cut transfer payments, and institutions are left with fewer dollars, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain commitments to make campuses more accessible to students with disabilities.
- Many students with disabilities study on a part-time basis because of their disability.
- The part-time provisions of the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) are inadequate. The Program has a ceiling of \$2,500 a year, and the loan must be repaid within two years, beginning thirty days after receiving the loan. While the government has made election promises to improve these provisions, no formal commitment has been made.
- Students with disabilities should be encouraged rather than discouraged to take a part-time course load if they feel it necessary.
- In 1992, the government proposed to eliminate the forgiveness provision of the CSLP for students with disabilities. This provision allowed a loan to be forgiven in cases where the disability reduced a person's chance of earning money to repay the loan. The government is now reviewing this decision.

a ramp outside. The things that need looking into are access to the Atrium, the Cafeteria, the Auditorium, and a few more that I hope to discuss in the next issue.

As a new student to OCA, I would appreciate any feedback from those seasoned readers who have any opinions or suggestions on this issue. Please drop off your questions, comments and concerns to my mailbox in the Stewart building.

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